

# *Conservation Matters*

*Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board  
Summer of 2007*

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## **Fish On!**

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Well, its getting into the summer months, and things are picking up at our local fishing holes. The bluegills (or brim as I've heard them called) are spawning, making their bowl nests in the sandy bottoms of our local rivers, lakes and ponds to hatch their eggs.

A fisherman at Mile Hill Lake recently asked me if there was something wrong with the fish in the lake. This had me puzzled, until he showed me his stringer. What he was worried about was evident on the side of two bluegills he had caught. In an area the size of a half dollar coin on both fish, the scales were gone, revealing the fleshy tissue that lies beneath, which was covered by a slimy coating. This was evident only on one side of each fish, right behind the pectoral fins. He was worried that the fish were diseased, and not safe to eat. I told him they were fine to eat, as long as they're cooked.

Now, if you take a moment to think about what I have already told you, you will have an idea as to what has happened to these fish.

When male bluegills are building their nests in the substrate, they fan their pectoral fins to move sand, to create the depression in which the eggs are laid. During this time, they are expending significantly more energy than they are taking in. Females then come around the nesting sites of the males, and through displays of the male, the female chooses which nest to lay her eggs in, and the male fertilizes the eggs.

During some of these pairings, there are other males (sneakers) nearby who will swoop in and fertilize the eggs as soon as the eggs are laid, which is beneficial to them because they didn't have to use energy to build a nest and after they "assist" in fertilizing the eggs, they don't spend any energy protecting the young.

Other times there are males who resemble females in outward appearance and use that to their advantage. These males will perform female displays – hovering above a nest already occupied by a female who is depositing eggs, and a male who is ready to fertilize them. This male will descend slowly to the nest, acting as if to lay eggs, and then fertilizes the eggs that have already been deposited by the female. This is called a satellite male.

Both the sneakers and the satellite males do not build nests and they don't raise the young, therefore they use much less energy. However, the males who have built nests will bite at the sneaker

and satellite males (and other males in nests close by), removing scales and tearing flesh. These wounds can become inflamed by bacteria, and in some cases where the fish is extremely fatigued or its immune system is deprived to fight the infection, it will die; other times the fish will heal and survive.

I've actually caught 8 bluegills this past week at Mile Hill Lake, 4 of which had torn up sides. They tasted fine to me!

## **Pony Creek Park News!**

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We've recently renovated the 6 electrical campsites here at Pony Creek Park. We have added retaining walls to these campsites for erosion control. In years past, the soil around the edge of the camping pads would slip down onto the camping pads and they would have to be cleaned out. We are confident that this plan of action will help to curtail that situation. Bring your camper out and give one of the sites a try!

We're starting to have a few more visitors out here at Pony Creek Park. People have been calling and visiting the park with questions about camping, things they found, and solutions to some problems they may be having with the local wildlife.

We've recently documented finding a Chorus Frog, a Plains Spadefoot Toad and a brown water snake here at Pony Creek Park. If you happen to need help with identifying a frog or snake or some other wild thing (other than children), please let us know.

You can visit us at 56235 Deacon Road, Pacific Junction, call us at (712) 527-9685, or email us at [millsccbia@hotmail.com](mailto:millsccbia@hotmail.com) with any questions, comments or suggestions you may have.

## **Rockin' Out!**

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Well, before the secret gets out...I have a confession to make. My name is James, and I'm a rock-a-holic. I have heard some fellow rockhounds talking recently about how, in their eyes, our hobby is dying. The hobby is not receiving much attention from today's youth. I would guess this has something to do with today's youth being more interested in video games and sports than looking for and at rocks. I would also venture a guess that some of us rockhounds are a bit rough around the edges, and impatient when it comes to children asking the where, what, why and how questions surrounding our "treasures".

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When I was a teenager my Great Uncle introduced me to rocks and minerals – including the ever present leaverite (leave it right there!). He had a lot of lapidary equipment in his basement, and always had a project he was working on. When he passed away, I received some of his collection, but some of the pieces were unlabeled so I didn't know what some were or where they came from. Serious collectors will attest that having a specimen, but not knowing where it was found, is (sometimes) worse than not having the specimen at all. It takes a lot of energy, research and sometimes money, to figure out what a piece is or where a piece came from. That is why a lot of collectors prefer to travel and collect their own specimens. There are many fascinating rocks to be found in Iowa. One is hollow and can be filled with lots of crystals or various other things. This is our state rock, the Geode, which can be found in southeast Iowa, near Keokuk – hence the name Keokuk Geodes. Another Iowa mineral, gypsum, plays a critical role in the story of the Cardiff Giant. For more interesting information on these, please check your library for Paul Garvin's book "Iowa's Minerals: Their Occurrences, Origins, Industries, and Lore". It is a great book about Iowa's natural rock & mineral features.

## My First Rock

I was maybe 8 years old, and was riding my bicycle, a red Huffy, down my driveway when my shoelace got caught in the bike's chain. I fell, my elbow hitting the gravel first, causing rocks to become embedded in my arm near my elbow. I untangled my shoelace, and limped inside with a skinned knee and holding my arm, bleeding from all the little rocks in my skin. Mom got the tweezers (and needle nose pliers) and began taking the rocks out. No, these are not the rocks I kept. When I went back out to move my bicycle, I saw a stone that was kind of...strange. To me, it looked like an egg. It had layers of milky white and brown. When I rolled it over in my hand I was spellbound by the little blotch of red I saw. I put away my bike and hobbled into the house with this odd rock, washing the rock several times helping to deduce that it wasn't blood on the rock. I still have this stone in my collection.

I try not to fall on rocks anymore. Instead, I prefer to browse eBay and other websites as well as auction houses looking for things that appeal to me, and hitting riverbanks for agates when I can.

## Iowa's State Rock - The Geode

The idea to designate the geode as Iowa's State rock is thought to have come from a visitor from South Dakota, who was speaking in Des Moines. This idea gained support by Iowan's who lived in the Southeastern part of the state, where geodes are still commonly found. Nine state representatives from SE Iowa led the drafting of House Resolution No. 14, which was introduced to the House on February 3, 1967. The resolution passed the House with a vote of 93 to 26, but it was met with some disdain in the Senate. The Senate felt that it was a trivial matter, and a waste of time. Max Mills, a Republican from Marshalltown, went so far as to suggest the adoption of a state nut, and implied that supporters for the resolution would be fitting candidates. During the proceedings, Senators were able to view several magnificent Iowa geode specimens. The resolution passed with a vote of 35 to 18 in the Senate.

If you wish to learn more about geodes or find some for yourself, you should visit Keokuk, in southeastern Iowa, during its "Rocktober Geode Fest & Hunt" which will be held from October 5<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> of this year. I plan to get there this year!



Geode

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

**July 4, 2007 – Independence Day!**

**July 20 - 25, 2007 – Mills County Fair** – Fairgrounds in Malvern

**July 28, 2007 – Breakfast with the Birds** at Ray Thomas Wildlife Preserve from 7:30am to 10am